

KY Tech-Hughes Jones-Harrodsburg office technology students learn importance of “Building Industry Connections”

Don't you just love it when a plan comes together - or better yet, when the plan goes way beyond expectations? It's genuinely satisfying when a simple idea turns into something so grand that it unites a community. That's exactly what Damian Laymon and his students have done through what originally began as a project for seniors in his office technology program at the Hughes Jones-Harrodsburg Area Technology Center (HJH-ATC).

Goal: Bringing industry into the classroom, educators into local industry and knocking down barriers to help students understand the challenges they will face when entering the workforce after high school. The result: Development of a website to bring industry needs into the classroom to prepare students for a career. Click on the following link to view the new *Building Industry Connections – “Your Passport to the Future”* website: <http://www.hatconline.org/connections/>



But how did this all come about?

In the fall of 2008, Laymon wanted to create a project for his seniors that would go beyond what they had learned in the classroom and at the same time incorporate the skills they had learned in class. Their task was to research the types of skills employers look for in a variety of different fields.



Laymon:

“Specifically, I wanted my students to find out what makes a successful employee and what employers are looking for when they interview potential employees.

“Instead of simply looking up sources online or talking to their parents and friends, we decided to arrange interviews with several major employers and school partners in our area.”

The project was well worth the time and effort. Initially, students began the this journey using multimedia skills they had learned in class to feature local employers in short video clips talking about the qualities they wanted to see in the workplace.

The result was over two hours of video footage and interviews from managers, human resource directors and business owners from several different companies. “The rough videos were good, but we didn't know how to use them or what to do with them,” said Laymon.

The perfect solution was beginning to formulate – in part by chance, in part by reaching for a mutually beneficial viable solution.

In the spring of 2009, local industry leaders, several of whom were actually interviewees during the videotaping project, reached out to the local school systems to improve relations among the school districts, industry and their future employees. According to Laymon, this was “exactly what we had been hoping to accomplish from our end.” Many companies hire hometown employees and it’s important for the talent pool to understand the importance of a good work ethic and the necessary skill sets for a specific job.”

Each group saw obvious benefits. Industry personnel had an opportunity to speak directly with school system administrators, teachers and in some cases, students. It provided a positive environment for communication that allowed everyone to better understand the types of skills, attitudes and characteristics business and industry needs from its employees. It also provided an opportunity for students to see, hear, and learn how to apply many of the concepts, tasks and lessons that they learn in the classroom to real world projects and processes. But, this was just the tip of the iceberg.

During the summer of 2009, local school district and technical teachers took a day to tour some local Mercer County industries where they actually learned how math, writing, teamwork, communication, technical training and professionalism all work together to create a well trained employee.

Once the tours were complete, Laymon realized that his original plan just became the project to unite business and industry, and the school communities. With what they had already accomplished, his students could build a multi-purpose website as a "bridge" between school and their local businesses and industries.

The steps were in place. It was now time to showcase students and their skills. In the fall of 2009, students Nichole Eagle, a junior; and seniors Derek Gravitt and Matthew McElwain began gathering resources, communicating with employers, and designing the website.

“The project isn't meant to be a ‘one and done’ type of website. It’s more like a site where students, teachers and employers can continually contribute,” said Laymon. “It allows us to place a variety of materials within the reach of teachers and students that have been endorsed and provided by local employers.”



Photo (l to r): Derek Gravitt and Matthew McElwain

Gravitt:

“This site can offer individuals information on how to build a better resume. I have enjoyed taking this class because it pinpointed the skills I wanted to learn. I believe I am now more employable because I have developed skills that employers are looking for in an employee.”

Gravitt plans to enroll at Jefferson Community and Technical College upon graduation from high school.

McElwain

“The site was created to help students transition from high school into the workforce and I helped design some of the profile for the website. In my opinion, it will help people understand the qualities they need to find a specific job. We actually have some clips of employers discussing workplace skills, company profiles and a sample job application.”

Matthew serves as vice president of his local FBLA chapter. Upon graduation from high school, he plans to enroll at the Bluegrass Community and Technical College-Lawrenceburg Campus. As a result of the statewide dual credit agreement, he will begin as a 2nd semester freshmen because he has already earned 13 credits in Laymon's class. From BCTC, he plans to go to ECU to earn a degree in interactive media.

“I knew when we toured the area technology center in my sophomore year that I would be taking classes here. This is my favorite class. I like this because it's hands on and helps people get into their field.”

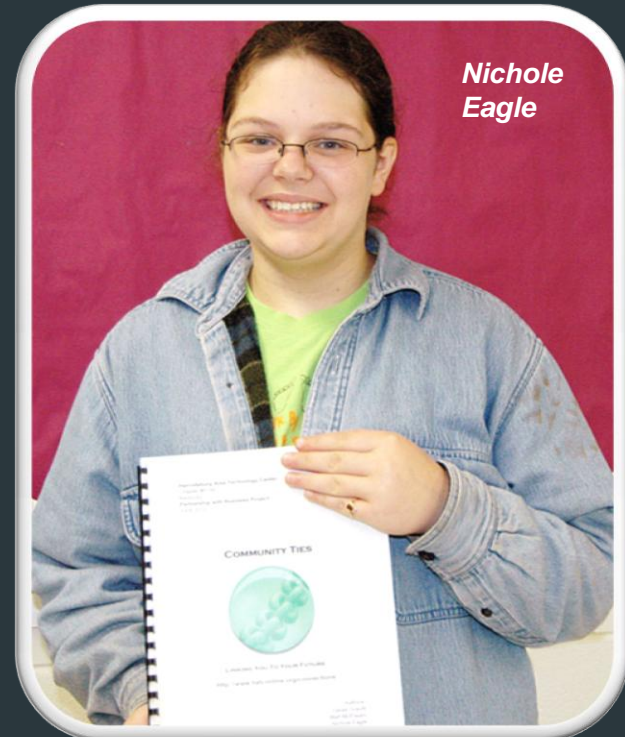
Each of these students is a member of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) student organization and the website project served a dual purpose this year. It was entered into the “Partnership with Business Project” competitive event at the 2010 regional and state FBLA competitions. One of the requirements of the competition is that a project report has to be created. McElwain and Gravitt were involved in the actual development of the website and therefore entered as part of the team in the event. However, Eagle was primarily responsible for creating the report.

Eagle:

“The report described what we put on the website. I believe our design skills and writing skills have been affected because we actually had to get involved and write the entire site.

“As a member of FBLA, I have learned about leadership and how to be a more effective leader.”

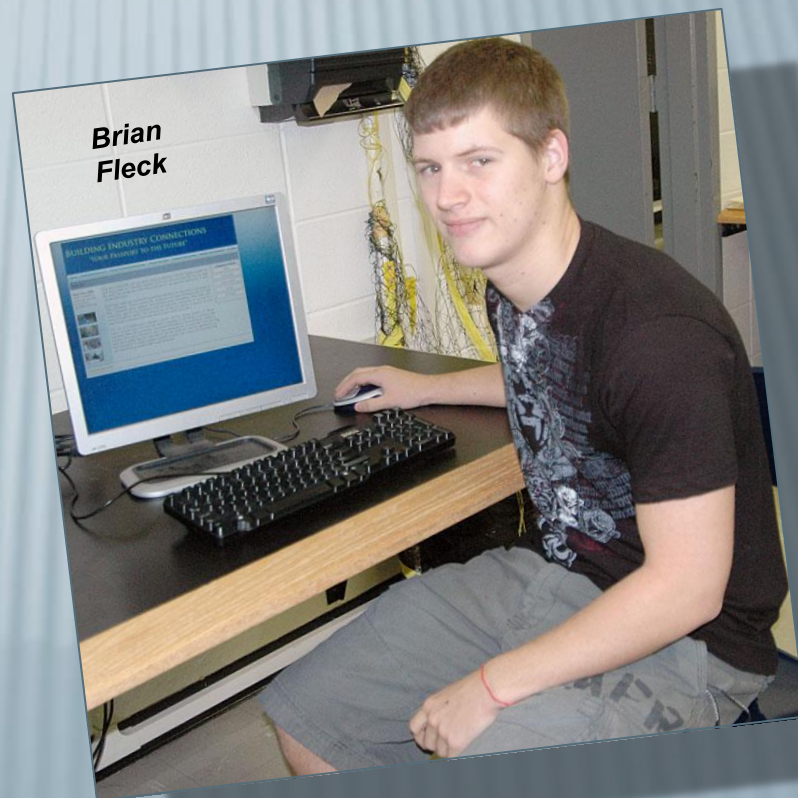
Eagle plans to enroll at BCTC-Lawrenceburg Campus and has 7 credit hours as a result of the statewide dual credit agreement with KCTCS.





The student team earned a 2nd place at state conference in the “Partnership with Business Project” event and will compete at national conference in Nashville, TN from July 13-17.

While all of his students worked hard to develop the website, Laymon called upon Brian Fleck, a senior, to help with graphic design elements. Laymon calls Fleck his “go to graphic designer,” because he “redesigned the look of the site.”



The ongoing project will allow students to get involved with business and industry personnel to fine tune website details and information. Each year, more information will be added and the look of the site will change accordingly.

Flora:



“We have a great connection with business and industry in our local community and the partnership continues to strengthen as a result of these collaborative efforts. When local industry initiated the process to improve the potential workforce in our community, Mr. Laymon and his students developed their goals and have been able to attain some uncommon results.

“This has been a remarkable undertaking and it will be a great resource for the community, as well as for teachers to help motivate their students. Our students have responded well and we feel as though they have grown tremendously through the process.

“Hopefully this website will support teachers as they dare their students to succeed.”

Owners and human resource managers from local industries were instrumental in helping define the primary skill gap challenges that included the following:

- Verbal Communications, Listening and Writing Skills – conveying thoughts verbally especially in situations, or with multiple data points. Ability to ask clarifying pertinent questions to obtain facts, identify solutions, and/or provoke ideas.
- Team Leader Skills – Preparing and implementing team performance measures. Building team relationships; directing or supporting group efforts. Dealing with change constructively and continuity in team communications.
- Critical Thinking/Analytical Skills – Worker's ability to solve problems through the use of a variety of formal process and reasoning skills.
- Computer Skills- Basic to advanced - depending on position requirements

According to Laymon, a great number of people have contributed to the success of this project. The main contributors and industry contacts throughout the process have been Drew Dennis, Harrodsburg Mercer County Industrial Development Authority executive director; and David Edwards, human resources senior manager, Hitachi Automotive Products (USA), Inc.

Dennis has been a main contact and kept local industry leaders in touch with the area technology center. Edwards has provided Laymon's students with information regarding employee expectations, policies, and training. He also served as one of the interviewees in the original project. The video clips can be found in the "Multimedia Resources" section of the site.

The creation of this website tool has been a great deal of work for Damian Laymon and his students; but, most importantly, the plan came together and exceeded expectations. The plan united Mercer County business and education communities, and achieved a successful outcome – “Building Industry Connections.”



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